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ABSTRACT

This collection of research findings by several organizations quantifies public ignorance of the U.S. Constitution and the success of the "We the People...The Citizen and the Constitution Program" in addressing the problem. Surveys by the American Bar Association, the Hearst Corporation, the National Assessment of Education Progress, the People for the American Way, the University of California at Los Angeles Higher Education Research Institute, and the United States Census Bureau indicate a poor public understanding of the principles of democracy and an apathetic attitude toward political participation. Intended to address this challenge for civic education, the "We the People...Program," designed by the Center for Civic Education, involves students in a rigorous study of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and provides for participation in congressional district, state, and national hearings. One research study has found that students involved in the program display more political tolerance and feel more politically effective than most adults and most other students. A second study concludes that high school students who have participated in the program demonstrate more knowledge of the history and principles of the Bill of Rights than students enrolled in high school civics and government classes using traditional textbooks. Reinforcing these research findings, the Educational Testing Service has characterized the "We the People"...program as a "great instructional success." (JD)

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We the People...and Civic Education:

Summaries of Research

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Leadership Training Conference

Center for Civic Education

February 1994

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We the People... and Civic Education: Summaries of Research

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   b. Study by Social Studies Development Center
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NATIONAL CIVICS RESEARCH SUMMARIES

ADULT POPULATIONS

***Bill of Rights Survey*, American Bar Association (1991)**

- The survey reveals that only about one-third of American adults are aware that the Bill of Rights is the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution.
- Only 10% correctly identified the original purpose of the Bill of Rights: to limit the power of the Federal Government.
- Nearly one-third incorrectly believed that the original purpose was to ensure equality for all citizens.

***The American Public's Knowledge of the U.S. Constitution*, The Hearst Corporation (1987)**

- Only a slight majority, 54 percent, know that the purpose of the original U.S. Constitution was to create a federal government and define its powers. Twenty-six percent believe the document's purpose was to declare independence from England.
- A majority also do not know what the Bill of Rights is. Only 41 percent of Americans know that it is the first ten amendments to the original Constitution.
- Twenty-seven percent think this document is a preamble to the Constitution.

STUDENT POPULATIONS

***The Civics Report Card*, The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (1990)**

- NAEP results indicate that students have only a superficial knowledge of civics and lack depth of understanding.
- Only 38 percent of 8th graders knew that Congress makes laws.
- More than half of 8th graders did not know the meaning of "separation of powers".
- Just half of 8th graders knew that the U.S. is a representative democracy.
- Almost half of high school seniors did not recognize the presidential veto, Congressional override, and Supreme Court decisions as examples of the federal system of checks and balances.

***Democracy's Next Generation*, People For the American Way (1989)**

- Most young people equate being a good citizen with being a good person, rather than with being politically engaged.
- Young people feel no compulsion to participate in the political system.
- They see the political process and national affairs as alien to them.

***The American Freshman*, UCLA Higher Education Research Institute (1992)**

- Entering college freshman showed an increased interest in politics in 1992 but a decline in the number of students who said they "worked in a local, state, or national campaign" (7.3% down from 8.7% in 1988).
- This decline represents an all-time low.
- Suggests that increased interest does not automatically translate into increased participation.

Census Bureau Information (1989 and 1993)

- In 1992, 53% of all U.S. citizens 18 to 20 years old were registered to vote, compared to nearly three-fourths of those 21 years and older.
- In 1992, 42% of 18-to-20-year-olds actually voted, while 67% of those 21 and older voted.
- In 1992, voter turnout of 18-to-24-year-olds was 43%, up from a 36% turnout in 1988.

Compiled by the Center for Civic Education

12/93

We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution

Leadership Conference Special Edition

Directed by the Center for Civic Education
Funded by the U.S. Department of Education by an act of Congress

Vol.8 No.1 **News and Notes** February 1994

STUDIES CONFIRM EFFECTS OF WE THE PEOPLE...

We are pleased to report that recent research demonstrates that high school students taking part in the **We the People...** program develop a stronger attachment to political beliefs, attitudes, and values that are essential to a functioning democracy than most adults and other students. This study and summaries of other research on the **We the People...** program are highlighted in this issue of News and Notes. For further information on these studies, contact Dr. Elaine Craig, Director of Research and Evaluation, at the Center.

STUDENTS SHOW MARKED INCREASE IN COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

In the first study to look systematically at the effects of the **We the People...** program on students' civic attitudes, Professor Richard Brody of Stanford University focussed on the concept of political tolerance. The significance of this concept relates to the concern that while majority rule is a basic principle of democracy, without attention to the rights of those in the minority, it can degenerate into tyranny. "Political tolerance" refers to citizens' respect for the political rights and civil liberties of all people in the society including those whose ideas they may find distasteful or abhorrent. Thus, a goal of civic education, in general, and **We the People...**, in particular, is to increase students' political tolerance.

Professor Brody's results demonstrate that students involved in the **We the People...** program display more political tolerance and feel more politically effective than most adult Americans and most other students. Findings reveal that these students exhibit more political tolerance in a number of ways including (1) placing fewer restrictions on the press, speech, and the advocacy of radical or unorthodox ideas; (2) being more willing to grant freedom of assembly to groups with diverse opinions; (3) placing fewer restrictions on due process; and (4) displaying a willingness to grant others wide latitude to speak and act politically.

Professor Brody concludes that the **We the People...** program is effective in promoting political tolerance because students in the program are more interested in politics, feel more politically effective, and perceive fewer limits on their own political freedom.

Participation in competition significantly increases positive effects of program

Another important finding from this study is that the more involved a student is in **We the People...** competitive hearings, the more politically tolerant he or she is likely to become. For example, participating in the hearings encourages students to support granting the right of assembly to unpopular groups and extending due-process rights and freedom of expression to groups and individuals that are "odd" and/or "threatening."

Professor Brody's research was conducted during the spring of 1993. The study was designed to determine the degree to which civics curricula in general, and the **We the People...** program in particular, affect students' political attitudes. The report was based on analysis of survey responses of 1,351 high school students from across the United States.

The full report, entitled Secondary Education and Political Attitudes: Examining the Effects on Political Tolerance of the We the People... Curriculum, will be available in March 1994.

NEW STUDY CONFIRMS KNOWLEDGE GAINS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS USING *WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL*

A new study conducted by the **Social Studies Development Center** at **Indiana University** under the direction of **Robert Leming** concludes that students participating in the **We the People...** program learn more and develop greater understanding of the Bill of Rights than students in government and civics classes using other programs. This study compared high school students using the Center's *With Liberty and Justice for All* textbook with high school students using other programs.

STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE SUPERIOR TO PEERS

Independent studies by Education Testing Service (ETS) in 1988, 1990, and 1991 have revealed that students enrolled in the **We the People...** program at upper elementary, middle, and high school levels "significantly outperformed comparison students on every topic of the tests taken." Based on the superior performance of students at all levels, ETS characterized the **We the People...** program as a "great instructional success" and concluded that the "program achieved its major instructional goal of increasing students' knowledge of the Constitution and Bill of Rights."

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE SUPERIOR TO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Even more impressive were the findings of a subsequent test in which ETS compared scores of a random sample of 900 high school students who studied **We the People...** with 280 sophomores and juniors in political science courses at a major university. The high school students outperformed the university students in every topic area and on almost every test item. The greatest difference was in the area of political philosophy where the participating high school students scored 14% higher than the university students.

STUDENTS SHOW INCREASED INTEREST IN PARTICIPATION

Educators taking part in the **We the People...** program have consistently observed that their students become more interested in politics and in participating in government. This observation was confirmed in a study conducted in Clark County Schools in Nevada: 80% of seniors participating in the program registered to vote compared with the school average of 37%.

CASE STUDIES HIGHLIGHT MAJOR PROGRAM EFFECTS

The Council for Basic Education (CBE) has been conducting case studies of the effects of the **We the People...** program, especially those effects that might elude quantification. Preliminary results indicate that "teachers feel excited and renewed...Students are enthusiastic about what they have been able to accomplish, especially in terms of their ability to carry out a reasoned argument. They have become energized about their place as citizens of the United States." The preliminary report also notes that "without exception, teachers asserted that the [simulated congressional hearing] competition had a significant effect on student learning. If it was decided early on that only one of a teacher's several classes would be entering the competition, the students in that class outstripped the others in motivation, extent of research, and depth of learning."

PROGRAM EXEMPLARY MODEL FOR PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

The results of a study supported by the Office of Technology Assessment of the U.S. Congress and conducted by the Council for Basic Education confirmed the effectiveness of the **We the People...** program in goal attainment and potential use as a model for assessing higher levels of student learning. In her book based on that study, *Testing for Learning*, author and principal investigator Dr. Ruth Mitchell states:

> The competition and the preparation for it have lasting effects on the students' learning. Teachers assert that the knowledge learned from the curriculum and the competition is drawn on all year. One teacher responded when asked if her students quickly forget the material once the competition is over, 'Oh no, it becomes a background for the Advanced Placement U.S. history class. Over and over again they refer back to such concepts as civic virtue or right to revolution in order to explain and put in context certain historical and modern events.'
>
> The competition has enormous potential as a model for the evaluation of history/social studies and government classes. It is the most imaginative and well-organized social studies assessment I know of—more impressive than current ideas at the state level.

STUDIES REVEAL NEGLECT OF CIVIC EDUCATION AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Although preparing students to become knowledgeable, competent, and responsible citizens has been a principal goal of education throughout American history, the field is currently one of the most neglected areas in school curriculum. This fact was recently highlighted by a review of the distribution of courses in the 1992-93 social studies programs of 47 states conducted by the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California at Los Angeles that revealed the following percentages of courses offering instruction in civics and government of the total course offerings.

Kindergarten to 4th grade	0.4%
Grades 5-8	6.9%
Grades 9-12	14.0%

This neglect of civic education is particularly unfortunate in the light of its historic role as a principal goal of education in the United States and of such research findings as those noted above, and evidence from the study by Professor Brody that all students taking high school civics, government, and American history courses are more supportive of the constitutional rights and civil liberties of dissenting individuals and groups than the general public.

CONGRESS MAJOR ADVOCATE OF CIVIC EDUCATION

Over the past thirty years, the major support on the federal level for educational programs in civics, government, and the law has come from Congress, not from the administration. Most recently, Congress has added civics and government as the eighth subject areas to become part of the National Education Goals by including the subject in the forthcoming Goals 2000: Educate America Act and in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This action should provide assistance at local, state, and federal levels for the improvement of programs in civics, government, and the law. Leading supporters of civics and government education in the House and Senate include the following members of Congress: Xavier Becerra, Don Edwards, William Ford, William Goodling, Lee Hamilton, Jane Harman, Henry Hyde, Dale Kildee, Major Owens, Nancy Pelosi, Neal Smith, and Lynn Schenk, and Senators Thad Cochran, Christopher Dodd, Diane Feinstein, Orrin Hatch, Mark Hatfield, Edward Kennedy, and Claiborne Pell. Colleagues concerned with the improvement of civic education may wish to convey their appreciation to these friends of the field.

We the People...
The Citizen and the Constitution
Directed by the Center for Civic Education
Funded by the U.S. Department of Education by act of Congress

Secondary Education and Political Attitudes: Examining the Effects on Political Tolerance of the We the People... Curriculum

Professor Richard A. Brody, Department of Political Science, Stanford University

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In the first study to look systematically at the effects of the **We the People...** program on students' civic attitudes, Professor Richard Brody of Stanford University focussed on the concept of political tolerance. The significance of this concept relates to the concern that while majority rule is a basic principle of democracy, without attention to the rights of those in the minority, it can degenerate into tyranny. "Political tolerance" refers to citizens' respect for the political rights and civil liberties of all people in the society including those whose ideas they may find distasteful or abhorrent. Thus, a goal of civic education, in general, and **We the People...**, in particular, is to increase students' political tolerance.

Professor Brody's results demonstrate that students involved in the **We the People...** program display more political tolerance and feel more politically effective than most adult Americans and most other students. Findings reveal that these students exhibit more political tolerance in a number of ways including (1) placing fewer restrictions on the press, speech, and the advocacy of radical or unorthodox ideas; (2) being more willing to grant freedom of assembly to groups with diverse opinions; (3) placing fewer restrictions on due process; and (4) displaying a willingness to grant others wide latitude to speak and act politically.

Professor Brody concludes that the **We the People...** program is effective in promoting political tolerance because students in the program are more interested in politics, feel more politically effective, and perceive fewer limits on their own political freedom.

Participation in competition significantly increases positive effects of program
Another important finding from this study is that the more involved a student is in **We the People...** competitive hearings, the more politically tolerant he or she is likely to become. For example, participating in the hearings encourages students to support granting the right of assembly to unpopular groups and extending due-process rights and freedom of expression to groups and individuals that are "odd" and/or "threatening."

Professor Brody's research was conducted during the spring of 1993. The study was designed to determine the degree to which civics curricula in general, and the **We the People...** program in particular, affect students' political attitudes. The report was based on analysis of survey responses of 1,351 high school students from across the United States.

To receive a copy of the full report contact Dr. Elaine Craig, Director of Research and Evaluation, at the Center.

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We the People...
The Citizen and the Constitution

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An Evaluation of the Instructional Effects of the We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution Program Using *With Liberty and Justice for All*

Robert Leming, Social Studies Development Center of Indiana University
December 1993

The study compared 375 high school students using *With Liberty and Justice for All* with 477 high school students using traditional textbooks in the 1992 Spring semester. The students were from twelve different states.

The results of the study showed that students who participated in the program scored significantly higher on a "Test on the History and Principles of the Bill of Rights" than similar students enrolled in government and civics classes using traditional textbooks.

Furthermore, nearly 80% of the students participating in the **We the People...** program scored higher on the test than did the average of students in the traditional classes.

Based on these results, the study concludes that students participating in the **We the People...** program gained knowledge and understanding of the Bill of Rights that is superior to students in government and civics classes using traditional textbooks.

The results from this study concur with similar results reported in a number of studies conducted by the Educational Testing Service which found that students using the textbook *We the People...* learned more about the U.S. Constitution than students who were enrolled in government or civics classes using traditional textbooks.

Please see the reverse side for examples of the kind of knowledge that characterized the test performance of students using *With Liberty and Justice for All.*

For copies of the complete report please contact the Center for Civic Education.

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We the People... Students' Test Performance Compared to Students Using Traditional Textbooks

What Students Knew:	We the People... Students	Comparison Students
Students knew that the Bill of Rights was originally written to protect individual rights from interference by the federal government.	60%	39%
Students knew that an agreement among people to form a government to protect their rights is known as a social contract.	77%	46%
Students knew that the main purpose of government, according to the natural rights philosophy, is to protect the individual's rights.	71%	47%
Students knew that some of our Founders believed a bill of rights could be dangerous because omitted rights might not be protected.	70%	40%
Students knew that some Founders believed that majority rule could be a threat to natural rights.	64%	39%
Students knew that the primary argument of the Anti-Federalists was that the Constitution contained no bill of rights.	67%	40%
Students knew that the right to equal protection of the laws means that the government may not unfairly treat people differently.	70%	45%
Students knew that the Supreme Court's interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment protects Bill of Rights freedoms from state actions.	65%	35%
Students knew that after passing the Civil Rights Act of 1957 Congress continued to extend civil rights with more legislation.	60%	36%
Students knew that bills of rights may be found in state constitutions.	60%	36%
Students knew that a basic difference between the Bill of Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is that the Bill of Rights is enforced.	63%	30%
Students knew that the most fundamental need of a constitutional democracy is an enlightened and responsible citizenry.	60%	31%

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Studies Demonstrate Instructional Effectiveness of *We the People...*

To provide external evaluation of the instructional effectiveness of its **We the People...** programs, the Center for Civic Education has contracted with Educational Testing Service (ETS) to conduct comparison studies. In 1990-91, ETS conducted controlled classroom studies of the middle school and elementary **We the People...** programs and also compared students participating in the high school program with students at a major university.

WE THE PEOPLE... STUDENTS OUTPERFORM COMPARISON GROUPS AT MIDDLE SCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY LEVELS

Two studies recently conducted by ETS found that students who studied the *We the People...* curriculum significantly outperformed students who used other approaches to studying the Constitution. One study focussed on 8th grade middle school classes in Houston, Texas. The other looked at 5th grade elementary school classes in suburban Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

At each location, multiple choice tests on the history and principles of the Constitution were given to students who participated in the **We the People...** program as well as to students who received their regular instruction on the Constitution. The **We the People...** students significantly outperformed the comparison students on every topic on the multiple choice test. Those topics included the political philosophy underlying the Constitution, the Philadelphia Convention, the new government, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

Based on the superior performance of students at both the upper elementary and middle school levels, the ETS report characterized the **We the People...** program as a "great instructional success" and concluded that the "program achieved its major instructional goal of increasing students' knowledge of the Constitution and Bill of Rights." These findings are consistent with an earlier ETS study of the instructional effects of the high school program conducted during the first year (1988) of the National Bicentennial Competition.

WE THE PEOPLE... HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS OUTPERFORM UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

ETS also conducted a comparison study in which scores from more than 900 high school students who studied *We the People...* were compared to 280 political science students at UCLA. The university students, most of whom were sophomores and juniors, represent a specialized sample of students who generally rank in the top 12% of their high school class before admission to this prestigious university.

The high school students who studied *We the People...* were not a comparably select group, yet they significantly outperformed the university students in every topic area and on almost every test item. The greatest difference was in the area of political philosophy where the participating high school students scored 14 percentage points higher than the university students.

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Listed below are examples of the kind of knowledge that characterized the test performance of students using *We the People....*

Student Knowledge: At the elementary level	We the People... Students	Comparison Students
Students knew that a republican type government is characterized by the people giving power to elected representatives.	81%	41%
Students knew that the reason the Framers separated the powers of government was so that no branch would become too powerful.	94%	56%
Students knew that the basic responsibility of the executive branch is to carry out the laws.	80%	38%
Students knew that the Supreme Court can declare a law of Congress unconstitutional under its power of judicial review.	76%	48%

Student Knowledge: At the middle school level	We the People... Students	Comparison Students
Students knew that a constitutional government always includes a limitation of powers.	59%	30%
Students knew that the idea that government gets its authority from the people is known as popular sovereignty.	65%	24%
Students knew that the Fourteenth Amendment was intended to guarantee the equal protection of the laws to blacks.	75%	43%

Student Knowledge: At the high school level	We the People... Students	University Students
Students knew that an agreement among people to form a government to protect their rights is known as a social contract.	80%	53%
Students knew that the main purpose of government, according to the natural rights philosophy, is to protect the individual's rights.	78%	54%
Students knew that the purpose of republican government is to promote the common welfare.	80%	47%

For copies of the ETS elementary and middle school report or the university comparison report, contact Elaine Craig, Director of Evaluation, at the Center.

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